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EXCISE

Department of State

INFO: AMMAN, JERUSALEM

FROM: AmEmbassy TEL AVIV DATE: 4 Oct. '77

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC, CVIS, PAS, IS

SUBJECT: ISRAELITE OR "BLACK HEBREWS" SEEK SHOWDOWN WITH GOI

REF: A. Tel Aviv 7441
B. Tel Aviv 7196
C. Tel Aviv 5140
D. Tel Aviv A-9

SUMMARY: The Israelite or Black Hebrew Sect is currently living in three communities in Israel (the largest is in Dimona where about 550 live) consisting of about 1100 members. The group appears to be suffering from an increasing number of health, economic, housing and morale problems which have resulted in several recent defections. The Sect leaders have indicated to Embassy officers their mounting frustration over the refusal of the GOI to regularize the group's status and accord its members housing and jobs on the same basis as Jewish immigrants. The arrest and subsequent deportation of a group of 25 Americans purporting to be Presbyterian pilgrims to the Holy Land during the last week of September appears to have been part of an effort not only to compensate for the defections but also to dramatize the group's unresolved plight through incidents which would get international attention.

The Government of Israel wishes neither to expel the group nor to legitimize its right to settle

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in Israel. It carefully scrutinizes Black tourists who are suspected of seeking to join the Sect. Some have been refused entry, others have been deported and some have succeeded in evading Israeli vigilance and in joining the group. Once new arrivals are integrated into the Israelite Hebrew community they destroy their identification and then become hard to identify.

As a result of the interception and deportation of this latest group of Sect members, the group's leader, Gabriel Haradol, has been jailed and faces deportation on charges of having no identification and being an illegal alien.

[redacted] Local Israeli community leaders have denied that there is racial discrimination and claim that efforts have been made to have Sect members join in local social and cultural activities, but that the group's separation from the rest of the community is self-imposed. There is as yet no indication how the GOI will handle the situation. END SUMMARY

Emboff Lichtblau met on September 28 in Dimona with three representatives of the Israelite Hebrew [redacted] They were [redacted] together with two of the twelve group of [redacted] leaders" who identified themselves by their Hebrew names as Isachar and Baruchia. Emboff also talked with officials of the local Histadrut Community Services offices who have been generally helpful to the Sect and who participated in part of the conversation.

Both [redacted] and Mrs. Anette Perez of the Histadrut Community Services in Dimona stressed that the physical conditions and the morale of the Sect were declining as a result of their deplorable physical condition and the continuing policy of the GOI authorities to ignore the Sect's request for having the residence status of its approximately 1,100 members legalized, in return for which, the Sect claims, it would assume all the duties and obligations of citizenship.

Presently the children suffer from various respiratory and nutritional ailments as a result of overcrowding and the strict dietary rules observed by the Sect which deny any members the consumption of animal protein or

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sugar. The Embassy was already aware of some internal [illegible] with some former Sect members moving elsewhere in Israel and others seeking to leave the country. Gabriel admitted that a small group of some 30 members in Dimona had already disbanded. The number of apartments occupied by the Sect had recently shrunk from 29 to 25 as a result of the expiration of two rental contracts. Since the apartments occupied by the Sect plus local airraid shelters are already seriously overcrowded, this made their situation worse. Men find it increasingly difficult to obtain employment, since they are not legal residents, do not belong to the Histadrut, and are either unwilling or unable to establish social and health insurance accounts. Although some employers are willing to overlook these problems, others will not since failure of employers to assure employees legally required social and health protection creates a potential liability for them. Presently only about half of the adult members of the group, i.e. those who arrived between 1967-1969, enjoy a quasi-legal residential status and are thus able to work. However, in order to make it impossible for the authorities to distinguish between those who have residence status and those who are illegal aliens, the members carry only the Sect's own identity cards and refuse to identify themselves to the authorities.

[redacted] told Embotf that the recent arrest and deportation of the group of 25 visitors (reftel B) had been the "last straw." He claimed that under the Helsinki Accord everyone should enjoy the freedom to move and settle anywhere one chooses. This should be especially true for those whose faith commands them to settle on the holy soil of "Eretz Israel. In connection with the arrest of the 25, the Sect's own leader, Nassi Gabriel Hagadol, also had been arrested and is now remanded in custody for 15 days, charged with having no identification and being an illegal resident. Thus he may be facing deportation. However, since he has renounced his U.S. citizenship, there may be a question of whether he can be forced to return to the U.S.

[redacted]



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All the Sect wants is to have the status of its members legalized, assurances that at least an agreed upon token annual quota of new members be permitted to immigrate to Israel, and that it be provided with land to settle and to establish an economic base.

[redacted] admitted that the heavy overcrowding imposed on the group had created health and sanitary problems, as well as conflicts with the neighbors who are disturbed by the singing and musical practices of the group in the courtyards of the housing developments where they live. At the same time, however, he felt that some of the Sect's difficulties were based on racial and religious prejudices of their neighbors and the community.

The Histadrut representatives who live in the neighborhood however denied this and claimed that the Sect members maintain rigid social separation from their neighbors and that their children were recently not permitted to accept invitations to join with other neighborhood children in the general Jewish New Year and Succoth festivities. They also point out that the Histadrut and some of the neighbors have helped the group in various ways, such as assuring them medical help in emergency cases and facilitating the Sect's educational and recreational activities.

COMMENT: Given the Sect's problem of overcrowding, coping with health problems, tension with neighbors, and [redacted] claim that other "Israelite Hebrews," although insisting on remaining outside the Jewish community, have a right to settle in Israel, the possibility of a compromise solution seems remote. It appears that the latest incident ending in the interception and expulsion of 25 visitors who sought to join the group under rather suspect circumstances, may have been staged in order to appeal for American and international support, and thus to force the GOI to make concessions to the group. Faced with internal morale problems and a worsening physical situation and seeing that the GOI is trying to avoid dealing with the group in order to discourage others from joining it while avoiding the onus of racial discrimination, the Sect sees its only way out of this dilemma in escalating its protests and dramatizing its plight.

Tel Aviv A-181

CONFIDENTIAL

Histadrut officials have told the Embassy that they would be willing to intercede with the GOI to help regularize the status of the group provided it accepts that only those who have been residents in Israel for several years will be permitted to stay and that no other members will be permitted to claim even a token "right of return." This, however, does not now appear acceptable to the Sect, although its leaders claim "that everything is negotiable." GOI fears that if it makes concessions to this group, many more Sect members would arrive, all insisting on a superior claim to the land of Israel to that of the Jews. This would cause not only communal problems with serious international implications but could also create precedents which might be exploited by other claimants. Thus it is by no means certain that a compromise formula will be possible. Clearly the GOI does not want to deport the 1,100 Sect members now residing in Israel because of the unfavorable publicity which this would engender abroad. In the meantime, however, it has selectively refused entry to some American tourists who are suspected of religious affinities with the group and of wanting to join it clandestinely. In at least two or three recent cases known to the Embassy, American black tourists who gave assurances that they would not join the Sect are now suspected of having joined the group and of being hidden and sheltered by it.

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